

# How to Become a Basic Needs-Forward College: A Practical Guide

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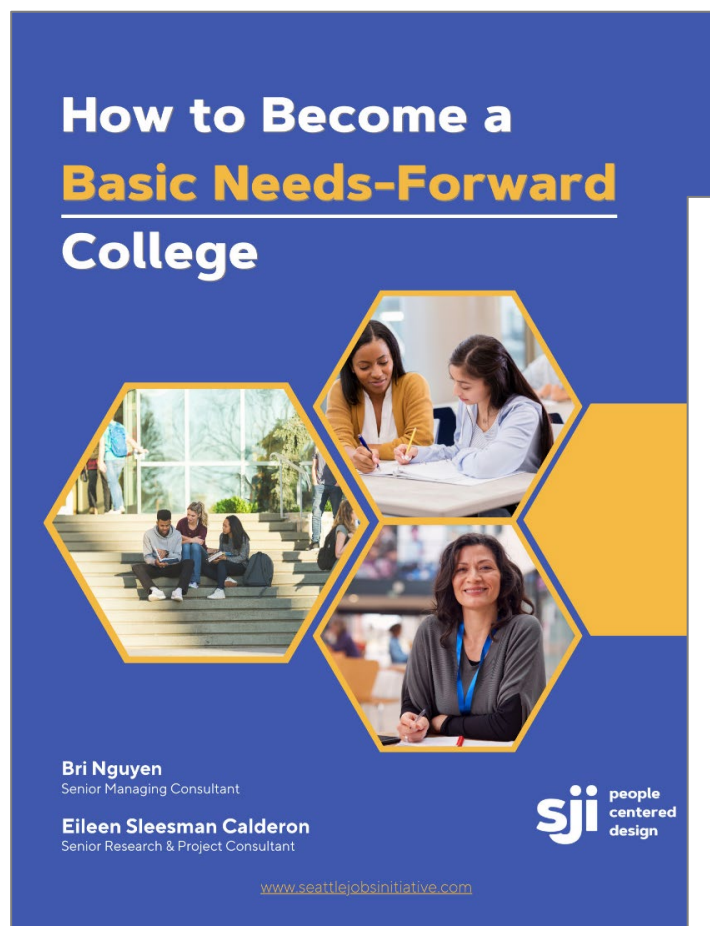
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# Introducing the guide + workbook

Download the guide + workbook [here!](#)



## **How to Become a Basic Needs-Forward College: The Workbook**

### Introduction

This workbook is for higher education staff, faculty, administrators, and practitioners who wish to strengthen the basic needs services and resources available to students at their institutions. It describes key characteristics of "basic needs-forward" colleges and provides a step-by-step process to help you adopt and advance this student-centered approach.

The content in this workbook comes from the guide [How to Become a Basic Needs-Forward College](#) by Bri Nguyen and Eileen Slesman Calderon from the People-Centered Design team at Seattle Jobs Initiative (SJI). We suggest reviewing the guide before completing the exercises in this workbook.

### Contents of this Workbook

#### **Essential information before you begin**

Below is a summary of key content from the *How to Become a Basic Needs-Forward College* guide that will help you complete the steps that follow.

#### [Step 1: Assess your current state](#)

In this section, you will assess current conditions at your institution to establish a baseline for your basic needs work and identify where to focus your advancement efforts. To do this, you will complete two assessments:

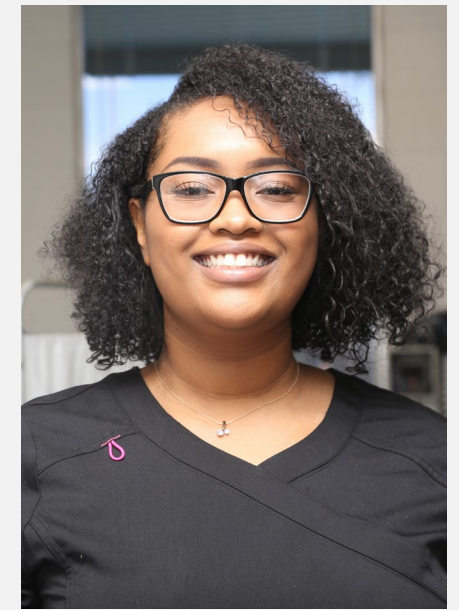
- Assessment 1: How **student-centered** is your current basic needs experience?
- Assessment 2: Do you have the **foundational components** needed to deliver a student-centered experience?

#### [Step 2: Identify opportunity areas and improvements](#)

In this section, you will review the results of both assessments, identify opportunity areas, and determine improvements you can make in each opportunity area.

#### [Step 3: Develop catalyzing efforts and your path forward](#)

In this section, you will identify one or more "catalyzing efforts" to help realize the improvements that you identified in step 2.



## Seattle Jobs Initiative (SJI)

Non-profit supporting individuals from underinvested communities in building sustainable careers through:

- Local education, employment, and training programs
- National policy research, evaluation, and technical assistance services

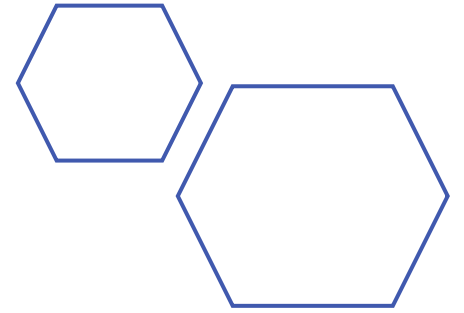
## People-Centered Design

Partnering with higher education institutions, government agencies, and community organizations to:

- Elevate student and participant voices
- Improve how programs and services work
- Use data more effectively
- Connect more people to resources

# Topics for today

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- Overview of the guide + workbook
- What it means to be basic needs-forward
- How colleges become basic needs-forward
- Workbook walkthrough + examples
- Insights from contributors to the guide
- Q&A

# Overview of the guide and workbook

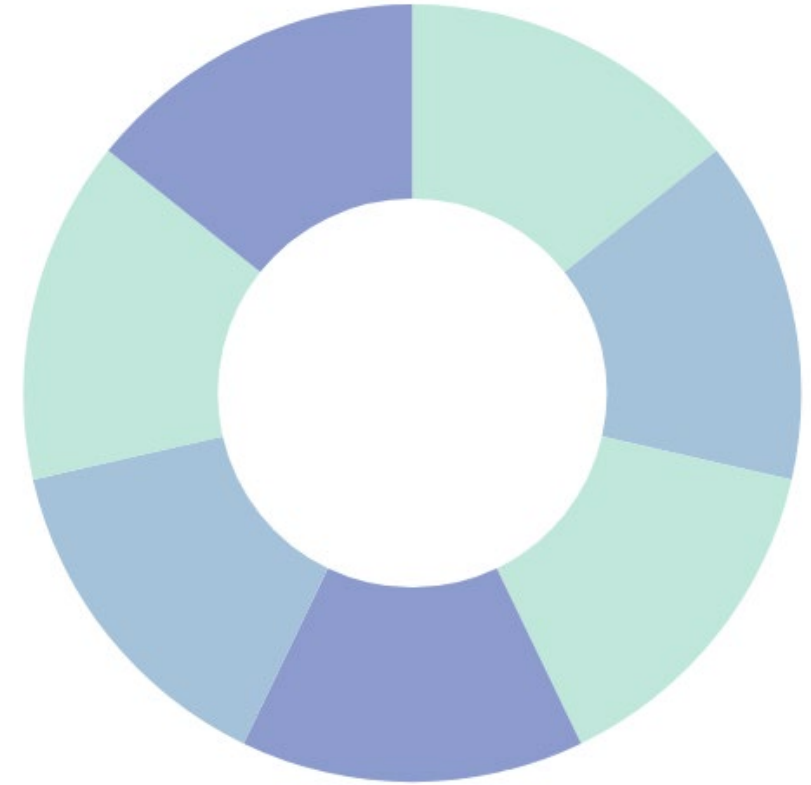


# How do you get from here to there?

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“Piecemeal” basic needs services



Cohesive basic needs services

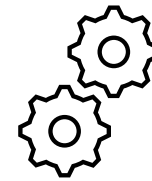
# Why and how we put together this guide

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## Key questions:

- What does a “basic needs-forward” college look like?
- And what does it take to get there?

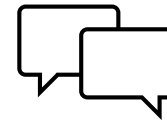
## Key activities:



On-the-ground work



Literature review



Interviews with 20+ colleges, researchers, and practitioners

# Why basic needs?



- College students face **higher rates of food and housing insecurity than the general population**

*([Inside Higher Ed](#) and [National Postsecondary Student Aid Study 2020](#))*

- 2024 surveys of students across the country showed that **more than half of those surveyed experienced basic needs insecurity**, including food and stable housing

*([Trellis Student Financial Wellness Survey 2024](#); [The Hope Center 2023-2024 Student Basic Needs Survey](#))*

*See references slide for sources*

# What are basic needs?

**Essential resources that students need to survive and thrive in college and in daily life**

**Note:** When determining how to expand their services, colleges should consider their scope and capacity and prioritize based on the most pressing needs of their students

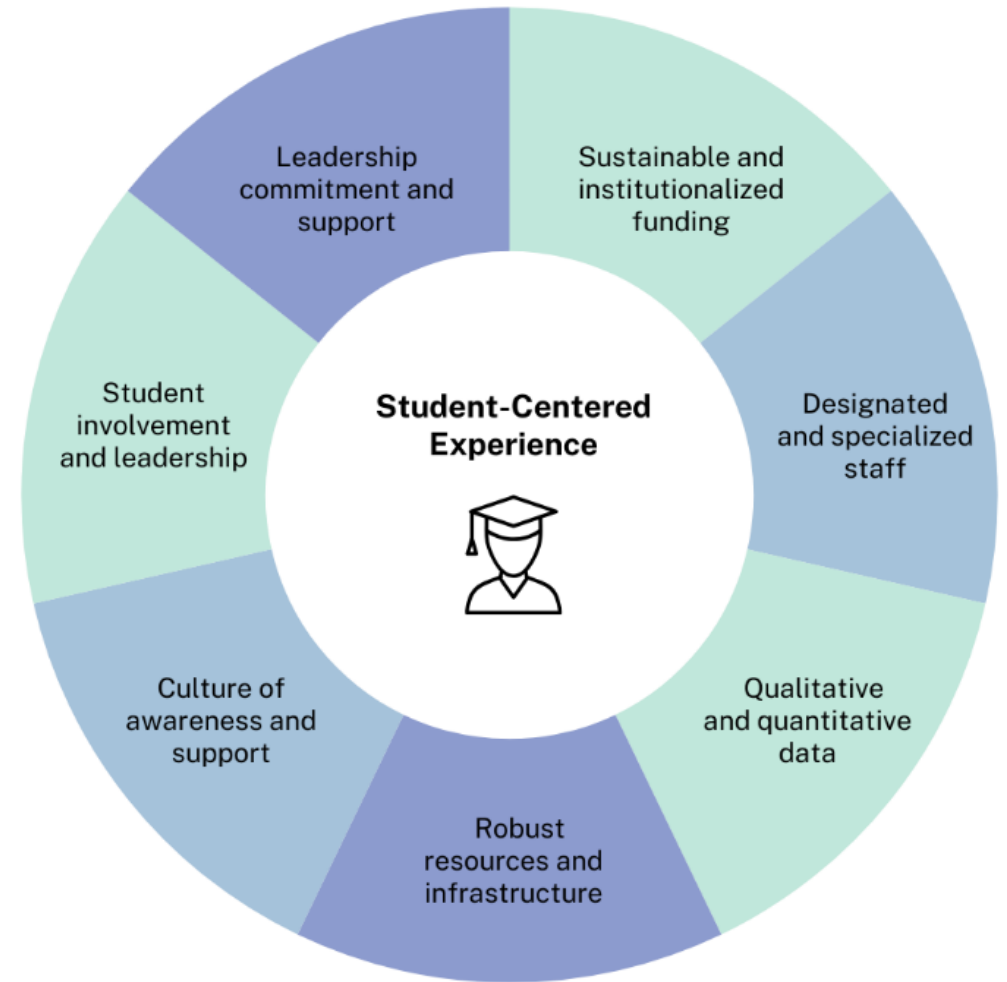
# Characteristics of basic needs-forward institutions

## 1. Offering a **student-centered experience**

*Intentionally prioritizing students' needs, interests, and experiences in basic needs service design and delivery*

## 2. Having key **foundational components** in place

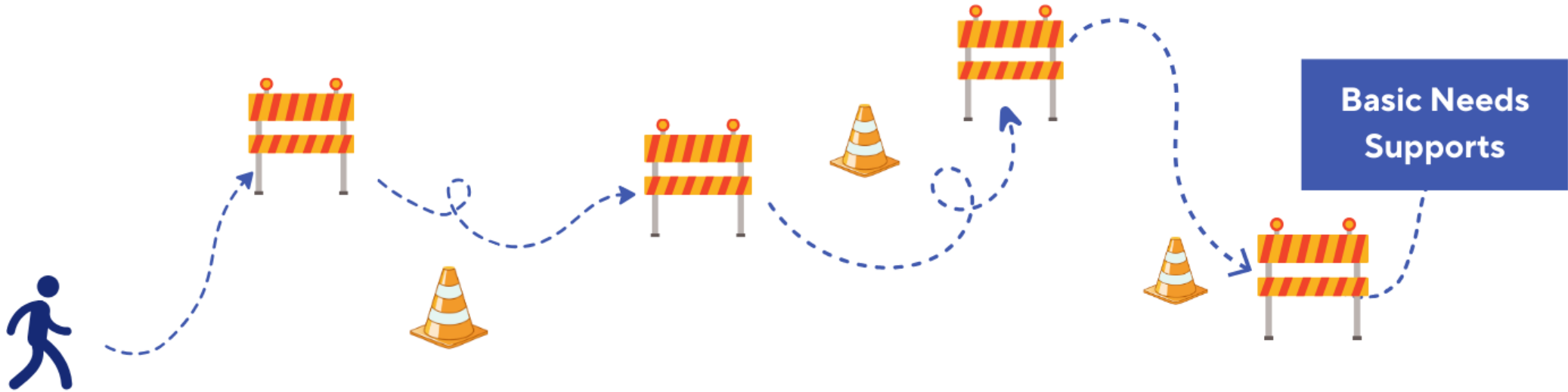
*Making it possible to provide basic needs supports sustainably and at scale*





# Offering a student-centered experience

# What students experience



"I'm not sure who to talk to or where to go to get help"

Not knowing how to access resources

"I'm afraid of being judged and having to prove I need things"

Fear, shame, embarrassment

"I found the information too overwhelming and nobody was getting back to me. I'm afraid to try again"

Inadequate support from existing resources

"I didn't know these resources existed and I thought help was only available if you were on campus"

Unaware/unsure of existing resources

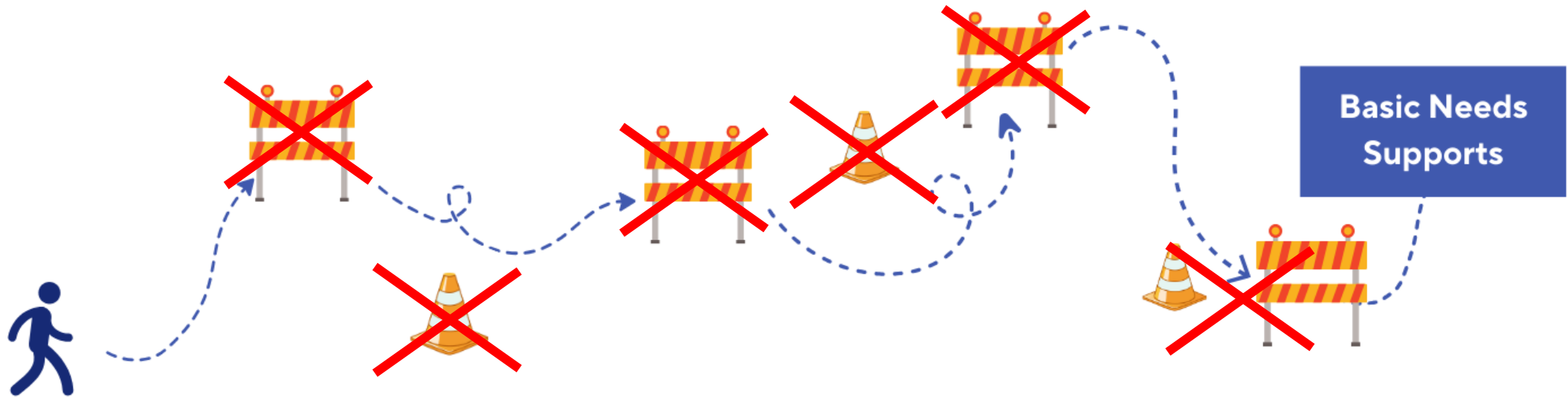
"I can't get to the food pantry because it's only open when I work, and the website is hard to navigate"

Challenges accessing existing resources

"I hate the process of applying and I'm crazy busy with full time work and school"

Difficult processes and lack of time

# Basic needs-forward colleges are intentional about removing challenges...



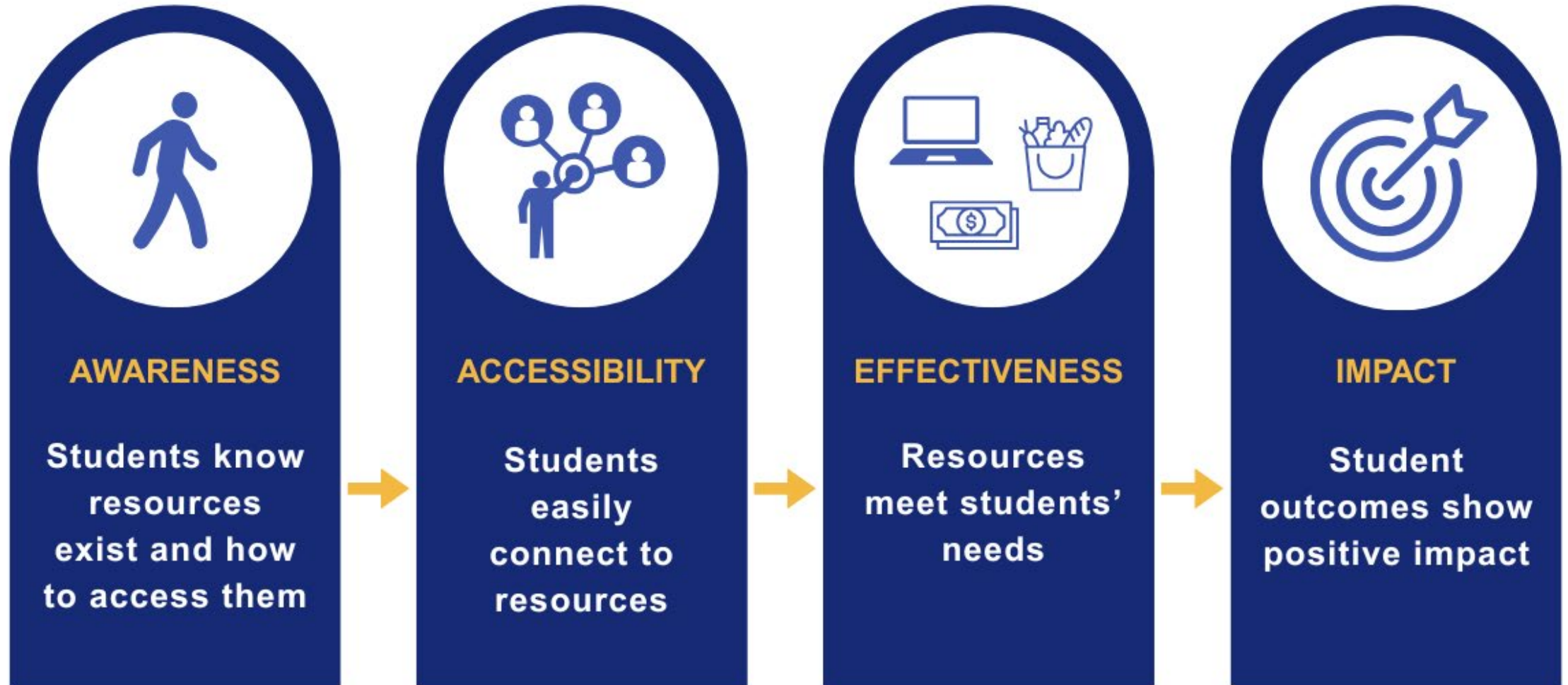
...making it **as easy as possible** for students to get the help that they need



# What does a student-centered experience look like?

# Four key outcomes

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# Two key practices

1. **Seeking input and feedback** from students and using this information to **craft, enhance, and improve** their basic needs services
2. **Tracking and measuring the impact** of these services via data and indicators focused on the student experience

# Gathering and using student feedback

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Type of Engagement	Example Methods
One-way feedback	Surveys, questionnaires
Two-way exchanges	Interviews, focus groups, informal conversations
Experience-based feedback	Secret shoppers, service walkthroughs
Student leadership and collaboration	Student advisory boards, student liaisons, student co-design teams or committees

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Be sure to be responsive to and **take action** on this feedback

# Tracking and measuring impact: examples



	Awareness	Accessibility	Effectiveness and Impact
Primarily quantitative	# or % of students with unmet need who are aware of resources	# or % of students who receive resources	# or % of students whose unmet need is met/alleviated
Primarily qualitative	Why students are aware or unaware of specific resources	How easy or difficult students found the process of accessing resources	Extent to which resources provided aligned with students' needs and circumstances

# Quote

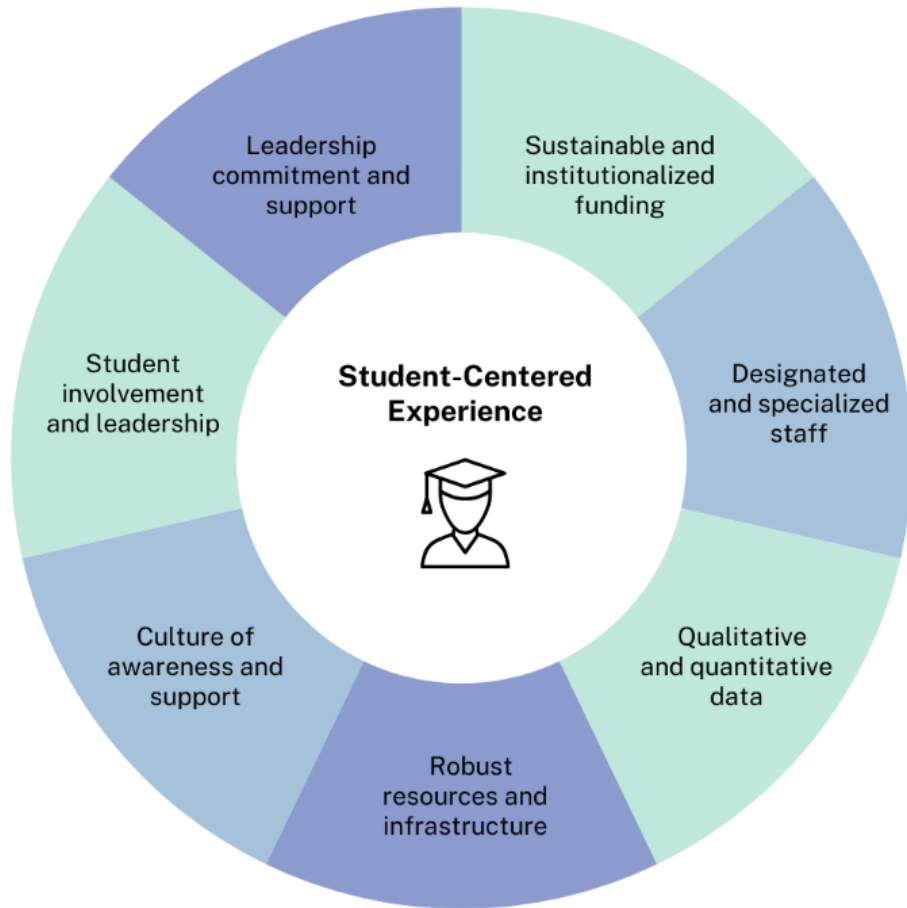
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“[We need] student feedback so that the **student is the focus** – so that we're not structuring systems to make our lives better, but that **we're making the student experience better**, and that can only be known from the student voice.”

# Foundational components



# Foundational components



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Leadership commitment and support

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Sustainable and institutionalized funding

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Designated and specialized staff

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Qualitative and quantitative data

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A culture of awareness and support

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Robust resources and infrastructure

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Student involvement and leadership

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# Leadership commitment and support

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“Oh my gosh, you need good leadership! Leadership has to be aligned with the mission and values of basic needs and the connection to student success.

If your leadership already started to say...‘well, why are we doing social service?’ then they don't get it. **And they need to get it. So that's the number one thing, is the top-down leadership.”**

# Designated and specialized staff

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**“[Basic needs work] can't be another hat for a person... [Y]ou can pull a person from a job and give them a new job, but don't give them multiple jobs...Pay that person well and let them be able to oversee [basic needs].”**

# Quantitative and qualitative data collection and use

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“That's a huge thing that I try to tell people...**you need to track that what you're doing is improving graduation, retention...**we know what works...but we have to have the data to prove it.”

“Probably the most valuable thing we've done and continue to do is talk with students...the **qualitative model** really lets them talk...so **we can best get ideas from what people really need, not what we think we need.**”

# Student involvement and leadership

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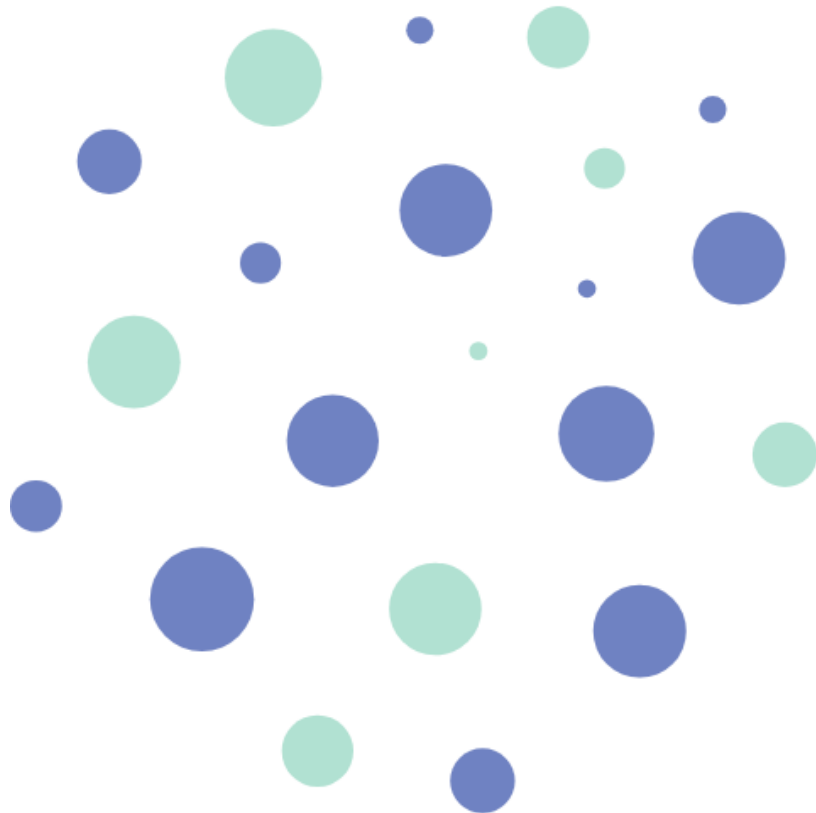
“My early strategies were if...I'm bluntly being told no, I **need to then work with student leaders because they have a different access...to voice requests or demands.**

[It is important to be] really working with students--  
**understanding what their needs and what their concerns are, and also helping them develop into leaders that can advocate better for this work.”**



# How do colleges become basic needs-forward?

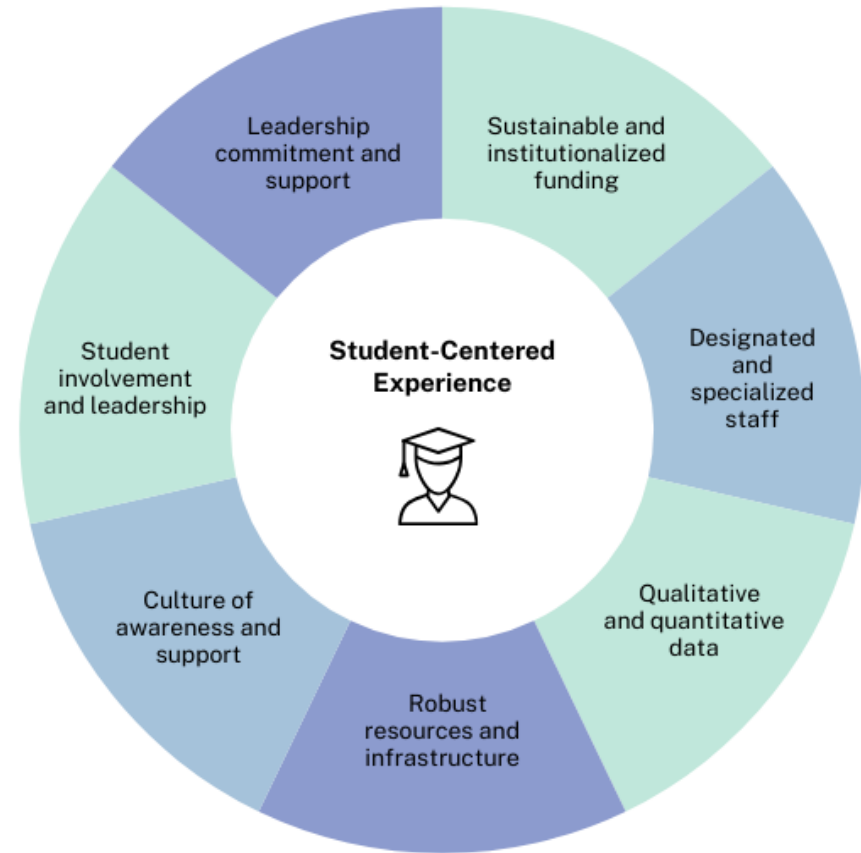
# Catalyzing efforts



“Piecemeal”  
Basic Needs Supports



Catalyzing Efforts



Cohesive  
Basic Needs Supports

# Catalyzing efforts

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- Actions and events that generate **momentum, awareness, and investment** in basic needs supports at the college
- Provide the **necessary push** for institutions to overcome the obstacles that stand in the way of becoming basic needs-forward

# Examples of catalyzing efforts

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- Staff led an effort to **survey students** to assess levels of basic needs insecurity and presented it to leadership to gain their support for more resources
- **Student groups mobilized** to organize a petition and eventually a fee referendum to expand their food pantry with a wider array of resources
- Passionate staff collected **whatever data they could** on existing resources, showing unmet need and gained additional funds
- **The college president directed staff** to prioritize basic needs in the institution's strategic plan and supported efforts to build capacity
- **State legislation** required colleges to establish basic needs-forward practices, such as basic needs centers (e.g., CA) and resource navigators (e.g., CA, OR, WA, IL)



# Quote

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“I think a lot of it had to do with, people like [us] just not shutting our mouths about it...we fired up student government and we fired up other students on campus and we made it visible...people couldn't not see it.”



*Catalyzing efforts*

# Quote

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“We had a **new president**...who really came in and asked, ‘OK, so where is student success work happening?...Who coordinates it?’ And nobody could really answer that question succinctly. So, **we realized we need to build some capacity to do that.**”



*Catalyzing efforts*

# Common routes

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**Route 1:** Leadership-driven approaches directed by the president or senior administration

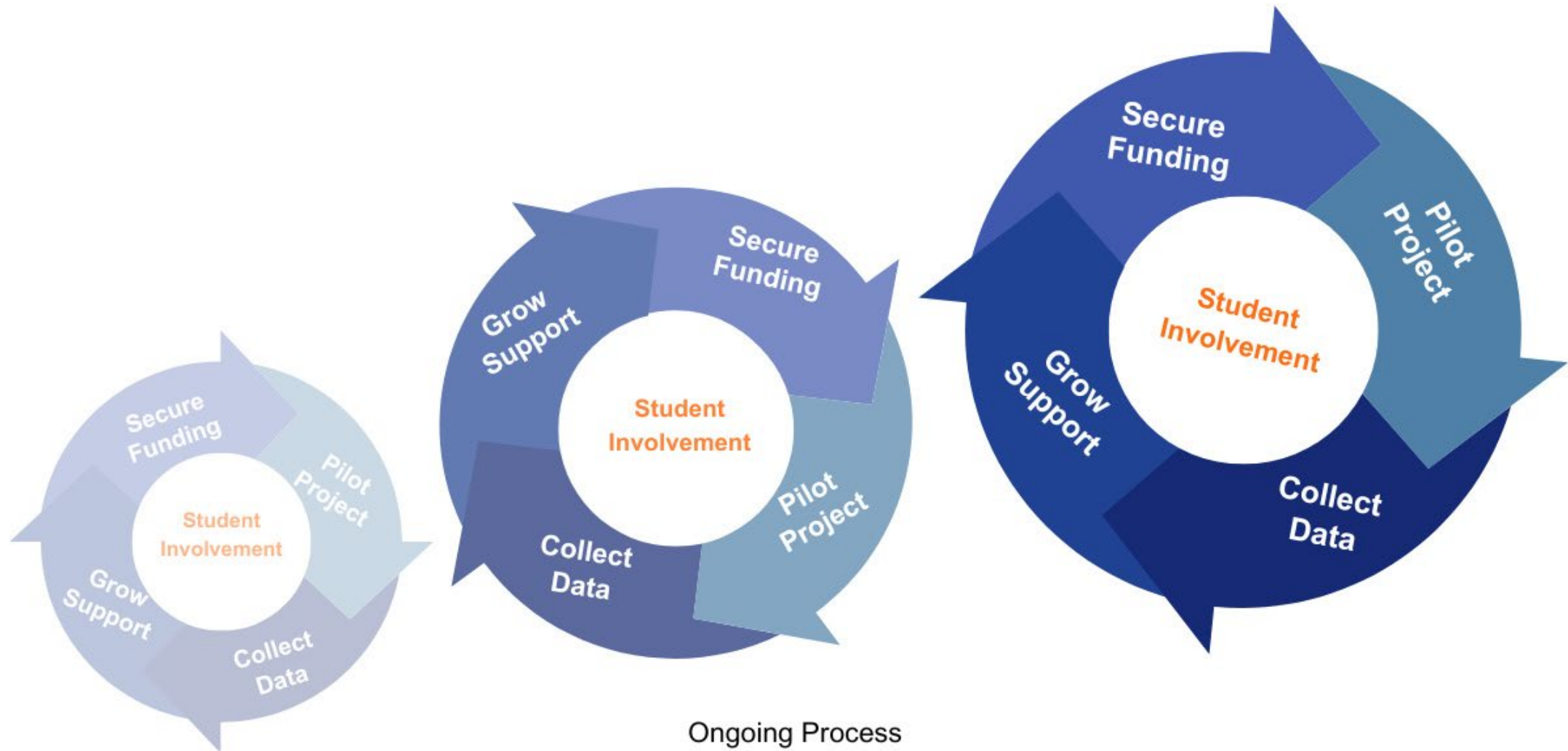
**Route 2:** Ground-up efforts driven by staff and student advocacy

**Route 3:** Policy-mandated changes required by state legislation



# Fostering growth: an ongoing process

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# Quote

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“We started collecting data before we knew what we were going to do with it... And then people were able to use that to help us get that message out where it needed to be because not all of us are influencers or decision makers.”

# Quote

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“We were able to...**pilot the [basic needs] program...We were collecting data**, and we could say the students who came in and met with us and got extra assistance...ended up passing those classes...And I think that **that was a huge piece for the campus leadership – to join in and get behind it.**”



# Workbook walkthrough + examples

# Charting your path

1. Assess your current state
2. Identify opportunity areas and improvements
3. Develop catalyzing efforts and your path forward



# **Step 1:**

# **Assess your current state**

# Take the student-centeredness assessment

- How **student-centered** is your current basic needs experience?
- Assessment questions in three categories:
  - Visibility and accessibility of resources
  - Delivery of resources
  - Quality and value of resources

Student-Centeredness Assessment

Visibility and Accessibility of Basic Needs Resources					
1. To what extent are students aware that basic needs resources exist at the college?					Score
Only a small percentage of students know that basic needs resources exist at our college.			A large percentage of students know that basic needs and resources exist at our college.		
1	2	3	4	5	
2. Do students know where to go and how to access these resources?					
Many students are unsure of where to go and how to access resources at our college.			Most students know where to go and how to access the resources at our college.		
1	2	3	4	5	
3. How easy is it for students to see and find clear information about accessing resources?					
Information about resources is inconsistently shared with students and communication channels are limited. Not all resources are listed on our website. Some information is unclear, inaccurate, and/or outdated.			Information about resources is proactively and frequently shared with students through multiple communication channels. Our website contains clear, accurate, and up-to-date information about available resources.		
1	2	3	4	5	
4. How comfortable do students feel accessing resources at the college?					
Many students feel uncomfortable accessing resources, due to emotions such as embarrassment, fear, and/or overwhelm, and/or beliefs regarding ineligibility ("I wouldn't be eligible for that") or resource scarcity (e.g., "others need resources more than me").			Many students feel comfortable accessing resources, trusting that our college will provide the support needed, and are thus less affected by emotions and concerns such as embarrassment, fear, overwhelm, ineligibility, resource scarcity, etc.		
1	2	3	4	5	
5. To what extent are resources and services available when students seek them out?					
Resources and services are inconsistently available when students seek them out (e.g., offices may be closed, appointments difficult to make, questions not sufficiently answered).			Resources and services are nearly always available when students seek them out (e.g., offices are open, appointments easy to make, questions sufficiently and quickly answered).		
1	2	3	4	5	

# Student-centeredness assessment: detail

<b>8. How easy is it for students to receive resources?</b>					
Many students encounter challenges or delays in receiving resources due to bureaucracy: rigid policies, inefficient processes and/or friction (e.g., complex paperwork, unclear info, verification requirements, long wait times).			Students receive resources quickly, with minimal hassles, delays, or friction. Policies are flexible and can be adapted to meet varying student needs and circumstances. Processes and requirements are smooth, easy, and efficient.		
1	2	3	4	5	
<b>9. Can students easily access one-on-one support to address their specific needs?</b>					
Many students find it challenging to quickly access one-on-one support from a coach, navigator, or basic needs staff member when they need it.			Students' needs are adequately met or alleviated through the array of resources and supports available at our college.		
1	2	3	4	5	

# Take the foundational components assessment

- Do you have the **foundational components** needed to deliver a student-centered experience?
- Outlines levels of implementation, helping you identify your current stage and next steps for development

## Leadership Commitment and Support

The college president and senior administrators are committed to building out student-centered basic needs supports at scale. They actively communicate the importance of basic needs supports, incorporate them into campus-wide strategy, secure and allocate funding for their development, and establish the necessary organizational structures and staffing needed to facilitate their expansion at the college.

(1) Not at all	(2) Some interest from leadership, but little substantial action	(3) Committed leadership, building systems and investment	(4) Committed leadership, sustained investment, and established systems
Leadership views basic needs services as outside the college's role and disconnected from student success	Leadership shows some awareness of and interest in basic needs issues	Leadership recognizes the importance of basic needs work and is engaged in building awareness around key areas of basic needs supports	Leadership is invested in the development of basic needs services and actively drives campus-wide awareness and support
No dedicated funding or staffing for basic work, only smaller efforts or programs driven by staff, faculty, and/or students	Little to no dedicated funding, staff, or committees to drive and support basic needs efforts	Some effort to secure and allocate funding for resources and some staff positions; committees exist to lead basic needs efforts	Sustained funding is secured and allocated for resources and established staff positions; systems are in place to maintain the work, track progress, and improve
No integration of basic needs work into institutional strategy or goals	No (or minimal) integration of basic needs work into institutional strategy and goals	Basic needs work is starting to be integrated into institutional strategy and goals, with emerging cross-campus coordination	Basic needs work is fully integrated into institutional strategy and goals, with coordinated efforts across departments

# Foundational components assessment: detail

## Leadership Commitment and Support

The college president and senior administrators are committed to building out student-centered basic needs supports at scale. They actively communicate the importance of basic needs supports, incorporate them into campus-wide strategy, secure and allocate funding for their development, and establish the necessary organizational structures and staffing needed to facilitate their expansion at the college.

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Leadership views basic needs services as outside the college's role and disconnected from student success	Leadership shows some awareness of and interest in basic needs issues	Leadership recognizes the importance of basic needs work and is engaged in building awareness around key areas of basic needs supports	Leadership is invested in the development of basic needs services and actively drives campus-wide awareness and support
No dedicated funding or staffing for basic work, only smaller	Little to no dedicated funding, staff, or committees to drive		

# **Step 2:**

## **Identify opportunity areas and improvements**



# Identify opportunity areas

Review your **student-centeredness** assessment results, identify opportunity areas, and list options for making improvements in each area

## Student-Centeredness

Opportunity area and priority level (low, medium, or high)	How can you improve in this area? (feel free to list multiple options)	Which improvement options do you want to prioritize? Why?
<p><i><b>Example:</b> We don't have the student feedback and data to answer the assessment questions and understand how well we are meeting students' needs</i></p> <p><i><b>Priority level:</b> High</i></p>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"><li>1. Investigate whether we have existing data or information that can help us answer the assessment questions</li><li>2. Develop a college-wide student survey to get this data</li><li>3. Hold discussions with students to understand their experiences and hear their feedback and suggestions</li><li>4. Engage 1-2 secret shoppers to walk through the experience of accessing resources and share their feedback</li></ol>	<p><i>Options 1, 2, and 4. We can look for existing data (option 1) and engage secret shoppers (option 4) while developing our survey (option 2).</i></p> <p><i>We can initiate options 1 and 4 quickly, and they can give us some immediate data and feedback. We'd like to start developing option 2 now so we can deploy it in 2 months (and every year after that).</i></p>

# Identify opportunity areas (cont.)

Review your **foundational components** assessment results, identify opportunity areas, and list options for making improvements in each area

## Foundational Components

Opportunity area (how can you improve in this component?)	How can you make the needed improvement(s)? (feel free to list multiple options)	Which improvement options do you want to prioritize? Why?
<b>Example:</b> <b>Leadership commitment and support:</b> <i>Build administrative support for basic needs work</i>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"><li>1. <i>Gather data on basic needs insecurity levels at the college</i></li><li>2. <i>Gather data on existing services: how they have benefited students and where there are gaps</i></li><li>3. <i>Work with VP/director/dean to present data to president and administration and ask for administrative support</i></li></ol>	<i>All three options are high priority. Ideally, options 1 and 2 would be completed first, then option 3.</i>

# **Step 3:**

## **Develop catalyzing efforts and your path forward**



# Develop your catalyzing efforts

What can you do to **generate momentum, awareness, and investment** in basic needs supports in the short term?

Actions or events that can help us move forward and generate momentum	What will this help us do or accomplish?	What data can we collect and/or share (related to this effort)?	What do we want the outcome of this effort to be?
<i><b>Example:</b> Survey students to understand their level of basic needs insecurity, if/how available resources are meeting their needs, and which needs are most pressing</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Will help us identify service gaps and improvements to make to current services</li><li>• Will provide us with data to share with leadership, our foundation, and the campus community to make a case for prioritizing, growing, and funding our basic needs services</li></ul>	<i>Can collect and share survey response data, paired with any existing data that we have available (such as secret shopper feedback)</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• An administrative champion</li><li>• Basic needs included as a priority in college goals/strategic plan</li><li>• Development of a basic needs committee</li><li>• Increased funding for basic needs work</li><li>• A plan/action steps for improving current basic needs services to better align with students' needs</li></ul>

# Example college 1: early stage of advancement

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## **Background:**

- Has some basic needs services, knows they can do more
- Services are scattered, siloed, and/or available only certain days of the week
- Need more support from leadership to centralize resources and provide a better student experience and more robust resources
- Little data available
- Committed student advocates

## **Areas of focus after taking assessments:**

- Getting data
- Leadership commitment and support
- Sustainable and institutionalized funding
- Designated and specialized staff
- Robust resources and infrastructure

# Example college 1: catalyzing efforts

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- Create a customized survey for students—understand current levels of basic needs insecurity and the extent to which current services meet their needs
- Work with student advocates to present a case to administration using data from survey
- Bring on social work graduate students from their own college or a local university
- Develop and run a small emergency funds pilot with support from college foundation, share data with administration



*Catalyzing efforts*

# Example college 2: more advanced

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## **Background:**

- Has done some basic needs work but needs greater scale (i.e., needs to reach more students)
- Not enough students with acute need are accessing resources
- President/leadership on board
- Some data, but not enough; wants to link basic needs to student success
- Held initial listening sessions with students, but nothing since

## **Areas of focus after taking assessments:**

- Improving and using data
- Robust resources and infrastructure – better ways to reach more students
- Culture of awareness and support – normalizing the use of resources
- Student leadership and involvement

# Example college 2: catalyzing efforts

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- Implement a pre-registration basic needs assessment for students; match students with resources; track trends
  - Self-reported levels of need before and after accessing resources
- Partner with IT
  - Leverage existing technology to deploy the pre-registration assessment, match students with resources, and deliver more robust case management
- Build a prototype basic needs dashboard
- Engage faculty more intentionally; hold a faculty training; create faculty champions
- Bring on student ambassadors; create student leadership roles; have students share their experiences with faculty, staff, and administration



*Catalyzing efforts*

# Insights from contributors



## Put in chat:

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What are one or two things that you did (or that happened) that truly catalyzed your basic needs efforts?

## Put in chat:

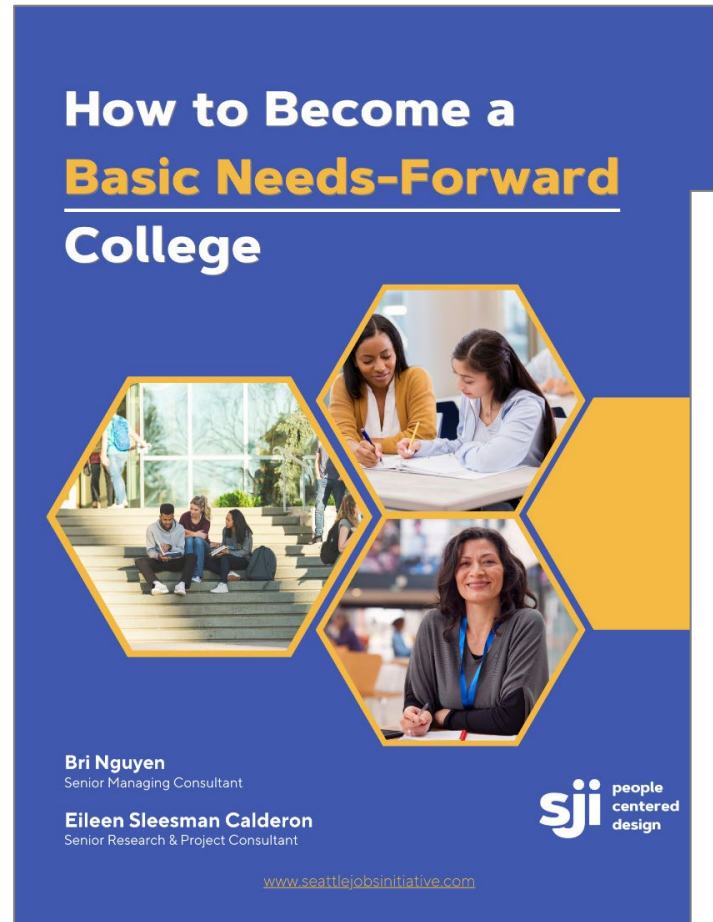
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What one piece of advice would you give to colleges wanting to become more basic needs-forward, particularly when facing challenges or roadblocks?

# Q&A



# Download the guide + workbook



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# Contact us

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Eileen Sleesman Calderon: [ecalderon@seattlejobsinit.com](mailto:ecalderon@seattlejobsinit.com)

# References

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